

An Analysis of Chinese Web Series Development and Strategy

Go Princess Go: A Case Study

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Abstract

An Analysis of Chinese Web Series Development and Strategy
Go Princess Go: A Case Study

Yiyi Yin

From 2012 to 2016, the development of Chinese web series was rapid. In light of the Chinese economic boom and prosperous entertainment market in the 2010s, there is a solid future for this industry. However, a few significant problems have arisen; vulgar content, fragmented length and inefficient marketing strategies. If these problems can't be solved, the development of Chinese web series will be limited. This thesis takes a successful Chinese web series, *Go Princess Go*, as a case study by using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the factors contributing to its success, and analyzes what pros and cons that Chinese web series should take into consideration for future development.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The internet has not only changed people's communication methods and means of information collection and dissemination, but has also changed media consumption habits. Web series were one of the products that were relaunched on the internet based on traditional TV series' formats. Web series have enriched people's lives and made the entertainment industry full of variety (Wu & Chen, 2015).

As the internet originated in the United States by the federal government in the 1960s; web series began and developed there as well. In 1995, *The Spot*, created by Scott Zakarin, about attractive actors' lives in southern California, was shown online and considered to be the first episodic online story (Lu & Zheng, 2015). After the merger of Google and YouTube in 2006, online video websites' potential value increased, triggering a flow of money and talent into the video website market (Li, 2011). From 2003 to 2006, several web series, such as *Red vs. Blue* and *Sam Has 7 Friends*, caught the attention of the public and became popular. *Sam Has 7 Friends* was nominated for an Emmy Award (Lu & Zheng, 2015). This popularity stimulated the improvement in streaming video technology, production and distribution. Some streaming services, such as Netflix and Hulu, began to produce and distribute content directly via their websites. *House of Cards*, which launched on Netflix in 2013, was an example of a successful web series.

House of Cards is a political thriller, adapted from the 1990 British series of the same name. Based on internal data, Netflix executives knew the three top elements that viewers loved: the BBC's version of *House of Cards*, the actor Kevin Spacey, and the director David Fincher (Fang, 2015). These factors provided Netflix with enough

confidence to put forth an investment of \$100 million in combining these three elements. What resulted was Netflix's first web series, the US version of *House of Cards*. After the first season premiered on Netflix in 2013, there were over 30,000,000 plays every day. *House of Cards* had the most plays online in the US in 2013, and was considered to be the future of the United States' TV industry by *Forbes* magazine (Fang, 2015). Moreover, on Metacritic, a website that rates music albums, movies and TV shows, all four seasons of *House of Cards* got over 76 out of 100 based on the reviews it received, considered as "generally favorable" (<http://www.metacritic.com>). *House of Cards*' popularity also spread outside the US, and it has become one of the most popular series among more than 40 countries globally since 2013 (Fang, 2015). The price for product placement on the show ranges from \$50,000 to \$300,000 (Dindar, 2016). Netflix's chief content officer, Ted Sarandos, pointed out that the internet changed people's behavior toward media consumption. The old viewership model won't work for the new "on-demand" generation, who expect to access content on their own terms. *House of Cards* is made for this generation (Luckerson, 2013).

The trend toward internet globalization and online video content consumption generated abundant online video platforms and cultivated the new "on-demand" generation in China. Between 2005-2006, Chinese streaming services and video websites began to appear. Most of the main active video websites in 2016 had their inception during that period. In 2007, more than 200 online video and streaming websites were developed in China (Lu & Zheng, 2015). After restructuring by the government and resulting market competition from 2008 to 2010, the Chinese video website market gradually stabilized, led by five companies; iQIYI, SohuTV, Youku, LeTV, and QQlive (Tang & Yang, 2013).

These five companies' online series plays represent 94% of the total number of views in the entire industry (www.cmmrmedia.com). In 2000, several college students from Jilin University created a drama called *Yuan Se* and distributed it online, which is considered to be the first web series in China (Jiao, 2014). However, the boom of Chinese web series didn't occur until 2014, along with the six streaming services' aggressive development and the *House of Cards*' influence. According to statistics on Chinese web series development by Guduo Media, in 2013, web series streaming on all websites nationwide amounted to just 1,000 episodes. However, in 2014, web series production increased to 2,900 episodes. In 2015, total web series production reached 5,008 episodes, increasing 72% compared to 2014. This represents over 2.7 billion plays (Guduo Media, 2016). Some popular web series, such as iQIYI's *Soul Ferry*, SohuTV's *Diors Man*, and QQlive's *Death Notify* all received over 30 million online plays. These web series brought the video websites significant profit, and discussion of current topics and trends. For example, in 2013, after the release of *Diors Man* on SohuTV, the company's advertising revenue from online videos reached \$125 million, which was three times its 2012 advertising revenue. Additionally, the number of trending topics about *Diors Man* on Baidu were 2.1 million (Wu & Kang, 2014). The growth in profit and popularity occurred not only on SohuTV, but also for other video website companies. However, together with profit and popularity, there was also inundating negative criticism of these web series concerning their poor production quality, low cultural value and large amount of advertising. Among all web series, *Go Princess Go* is the best representative of this phenomenon.

Go Princess Go is LeTV's web series. As of 2015, it had produced 37 episodes, with a \$15,000 production budget per episode. It generated over 30 million online plays,

bringing LeTV more than \$15,500,000 in profit and 2,200,000 new subscribers (www.askci.com). Based on CNNIC data (Chinese Internet Network Information Center), by June, 2015, there were 46 million video websites users in China. *Go Princess Go* has an average of 4143 plays per episode, which means among every 10 video website users, there was one person watching *Go Princess Go* (Huang, 2016). More than 300,000 online comments were recorded about this web series; however, most of them were negative or cited as jokes. This thesis explores the future path of Chinese web series by studying the unusual success of *Go Princess Go*.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

After extensive restructuring from 2008 to 2010, the Chinese video website industry seems to have remained steady. The creation of better quality and popular web series has become the core competition among all online video platforms. In light of the economic boom, there is a great future for this industry. However, if significant problems surrounding this platform can't be solved effectively and efficiently, the development of video websites and web series will be impeded.

Owing to the nation-owned-and-operated reality of Chinese TV networks, as well as censorship and control of TV content from the Chinese government (typically the Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee and State Administration of Radio, Film and Television), content for TV series has always been safe for the general public. The genres and content for broadcasting TV series have been limited to history, biography or modern family dramas. Web series, tracing back to their inception in 2000, seemed to try to differentiate themselves from the traditional TV series; web series' viewership has a

close relationship to internet availability. In China, web series' demographics are younger, 20 to 30 year olds, and predominantly male (Lu & Zheng, 2015). In order to attract a younger audience and stand out from the competition, web series' genres and content concentrate on sitcoms, teen dramas, romantic dramas, suspense, fantasy and thrillers. Meanwhile, the content and characters in web series avoid the top-down educational tone and the typical hero archetypes seen in traditional TV series. Instead, web series' focus on showing the common person's life story and challenge traditional formats that cater to "elite" culture. This diversification satisfies the audience's various needs, and enriches Chinese drama culture (He & Xu, 2015). However, because web series are still an up and coming form of entertainment and are still in their early stages of development, the Chinese government hasn't had specific rules and provisions on web series' content. As a result, many video websites produced web series with vulgar content, or simply put nonsense spoof, sex and violence elements into the series' for the purpose of attracting audiences, which drags down the industry's content quality and cultural value (Xu & Zhang, 2015).

The internet has changed people's life styles, leading people's viewing in an era of fragmentation. In the 21st century, the audience has turned from a passive information receiver into an active information collector by means of the audience's own choice, such as with content, method and time. The time length that people stay on one topic has become shorter (Wu & Chen, 2015). Web series allow their viewers to choose and play streaming videos based on their own preferences on any platform they have and in any format they are interested in. Moreover, Chinese web series' episode length tends to be short, to fit the present audience's need for instant gratification. However, due to most Chinese web series being low budget, a collection of short online jokes, spoofs and commercials, they are not

even considered to be a sitcom, but rather, super-short web series (Zhang, 2015). With episode lengths under 20 minutes, they have turned out to be the majority genre in the market. In 2014, web series with episode lengths under 20 minutes represented 71% of the entire web series production in China, and the ones with episode lengths of less than 10 minutes were 44% of the total production. Within this 44%, the series with episode lengths under 5 minutes accounted for half. However, 70% of the popular web series with over 10 million plays are the ones with over 20 minutes of content per episode (Guduo Media, 2015). As more and more super-short web series debuted, viewers became tired of seeing the non-creative online jokes and frequent commercials. And the super-short web series sliced the content of the drama. Within its limited time, the story can't be told well (Zhang, 2015).

There are three main methods for Chinese web series to create revenue: pre-roll video advertising, product placement, and subscription services (Qian & Tang, 2015). The production cycle for web series are relatively short, from less than a week to a month, which is convenient for advertisers, as they can take advantage of their need to promote products. Chinese web series' also have more control of content, set, and plot, compared to traditional TV series. Thus, Chinese web series have solidified interest from advertisers (Zheng, 2015). However, due to the long length of pre-roll video advertising and the low quality of product placement, the web series' quality and the audience's viewing experience have been ruined (Qian & Tang, 2015). On the other hand, according to a survey on video website subscriptions in 2014, only 15.3% of the respondents were willing to subscribe to a video website to watch web series; 49.1% of respondents were not willing to do so; and the rest would like to decide based upon quality and price (Chen, 2014). The

data show that Chinese audiences are still not accustomed to a subscription model to watch streaming videos, which is a common custom in the United States and European countries.

Overall, on the path of their development, Chinese web series are mainly facing three problems in content, format, and marketing. This thesis explores how Chinese web series can improve these three areas and help succeed in their future development.

1.3 Background and Need

Chinese video websites didn't begin producing original content until 2009, and only two shows were released online at that time by Youku (Xu & Zhang, 2015). From 2009 to 2016, Chinese web series developed rapidly, and the content and formats became more varied. There are several reasons behind this growth.

Due to the long period of monopoly positioning (traditional TV networks controlled both production and distribution), Chinese web series had difficulties spending an appropriate amount of money to purchase high-quality TV series to compete with traditional TV networks. In the first half of 2011, the copyright price for one TV series episode to stream online was about \$60,000. However, by the end of 2011, the price increased to an average of \$160,000 per episode (Lu & Zheng). *Secret History of Princess Taiping* that iQIYI bought to stream cost \$330,000 per episode and \$8.4 million for the entire series (Lu & Zheng, 2015). By 2013, Youku, one of the biggest video websites in China, lost \$97 million because of the copyright purchase of TV series (Fan & Ma, 2014). However, the budget for producing one episode of a web series is around one third of the cost to purchase one episode of a traditional TV series. For example, the budget for one episode of *Soul Ferry* is less than \$16,000, and the entire first season of *Dior's Man* is

around \$115,000 (Fan & Ma, 2014). The high price of purchasing TV series restricted video websites' profit and competitive ability. Thus, video websites sought to produce and stream their own web series.

Chinese web series were mainly created for video websites and internet consumers, especially the millennial generation who were born after 1980. This demographic became 60% of TV series' consumers in the 2010's (Sun, 2015). Thus, content catering to this target audience serves as the strength for web series. Traditional TV dramas mainly target people who were born during the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, the mass demand for various and different content that distinguished itself from traditional TV series pushed web series to explore more possibilities in content production, which has brought the web series unparalleled prosperity (Chou, 2015).

The speed of technological development in media has been rapid, changing people's perspectives and customs of absorbing information and enjoying entertainment. On December 4th, 2013, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology of China granted the top three Chinese telecom operators 4G licenses, indicating the entrance of the Chinese telecom industry into the 4G era (Fan & Ma, 2014). This opened the possibility for video website' platforms to expand to multiple screens, such as the personal computer, smart phone, tablet, and smart TV, which also contributed to video websites' web series ability to reach millions of additional viewers. Web series production also mixed 4K, 3D, Virtual Reality, Live Streaming, and Bullet Screens in their screening formats, attracting audiences to get involved and interact with the web series. It incited people's motivation to subscribe to video websites and watch their shows (Huang, 2015).

Web series are one of the main products helping Chinese video websites to keep and increase their subscribers and develop their business. Video websites have contributed large amounts of money, talent and technology to improve web series' competitive ability. It has also helped expand its market, which brought these websites great results. For example, *Amazing Detective Di Renjie* produced by Youku and QQlive, *Back in Time* produced by Sohu, and *Two Idiots 2* produced by iQIYI all received more than 10 million plays online.

Table 1

Chinese web series streaming hits for the first half year of 2015

Title	Total hits (millions)	Websites	Hits/episode (millions)	Release date (mm/dd/yyyy)
Amazing Detective Di Renjie	26.7	Youku, QQlive	3.0	02/25/2015
Back in Time	21.6	SohuTV	1.4	08/04/2014
Two Idiots 2	18.3	iQIYI	0.9	12/26/2014
The Emperor Through to the Modern	17.9	LeTV	0.3	12/29/2014
Falling Down	17.8	SohuTV	0.9	03/16/2015
Light of Love	10.3	QQlive	0.9	02/02/2015
Diors Man 3	8.5	SohuTV	1.1	02/26/2015
Unexpectedness 2	8.4	Youku	0.5	07/01/2014

Source: CMMR Report of Chinese Video Websites Survey and Research, 2015

These web series seized millions of viewers from traditional TV series markets, but none of them had the absolute competitive advantage compared to big budget and high

quality TV series, until the release of *Go Princess Go*. *Go Princess Go*, produced by LeTV, is a fantasy comedy that tells a story about a modern playboy who travels back to ancient times and lives in the body of a princess, mixing the concepts of time travel, bisexuality and transgender. It was released in December 2015, and had 37 episodes, each with 20-25 minutes of content per episode. LeTV utilized a \$3 million budget for this show, and generated over \$1.5 million in profit and 2.4 billion streaming hits in total (Feng, 2016). Without famous talent, popular IP (Intellectual Property), or a large budget, *Go Princess Go* outperformed many well-made TV series and became a viral popular show after it premiered (Sun, 2016).

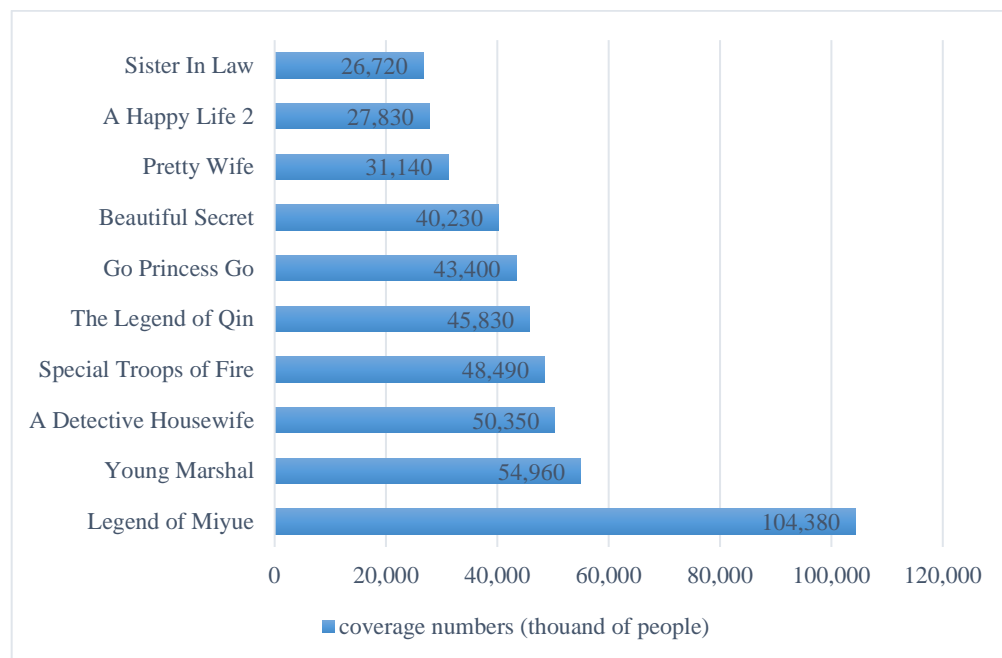


Figure 1. Top 10 TV and web series online broadcast coverage

Source: iVideo Tracker, January 2016

Go Princess Go was a number one hot topic on Weibo (Chinese Twitter), for more than 10 days and was considered to be the new model for a successful web series in China. Its production and marketing generated buzz and became greatly discussed and studied within the industry (Feng, 2016).

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to utilize the case of *Go Princess Go* to explore which factors contributed to its success and which factors Chinese web series should take into consideration for future development by analyzing interviews and questionnaire surveys.

Because of intense competition and loose regulation, web series with vulgar content, low cultural value, fragmented length and commercial placement occupy the market. Some of these low quality series may provide some profit for a period of time. However, as audience tastes improve and the competition from inside and outside the web series industry intensifies, if Chinese video website operators can't find a way to solve the above problems and make improvements, the new born Chinese web series may lose its charm and leave a bad taste in the audiences' mouth; video websites may lose profit and impede industry development.

In order to research the success of *Go Princess Go* and determine what factors contributed to its popularity among audiences, the researcher implemented a survey for web series viewers and analyzed interviews with *Go Princess Go*'s director, producers and relevant staff. It is important for web series producers to take advice from the *Go Princess Go* experience and implement this for web series' future development.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What elements trigger the Chinese audience to watch a web series and what creative elements helped the series gain popularity?
2. What streaming platform, format and length of a web series are appropriate for viewing behavior?
3. What are the marketing strategies utilized in a successful web series to help maximize its viewership?

1.6 Significance to the Field

In terms of the Chinese web series business, the market is still relatively immature and video websites operators have just begun to explore more avenues in this industry. This research takes a successful web series as a case study, and discusses the pros and cons in three key aspects in web series' production: content, format and marketing, which will be a guide for the web series business to explore its future path.

1.7 Definitions

Web Series:

A web series is a genre of dramatic programming that is independently produced or co-produced by video websites and utilizes the internet as the main distribution platform.

Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee:

The Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee is an internal division of the Communist Party of China, which was founded in May 1924. It is in charge of ideology-

related work, and serves the Communist Party of China as an important organ in China's propaganda system. It enforces media censorship and control.

State Administration of Radio, Film and Television:

The State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, also known as State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television of the People's Republic of China, is an executive branch under the State Council of China. Its main task is the administration and supervision of state-owned enterprises engaged in the television, radio, and film industries. It directly controls state-owned enterprises and the national level television, radio, movie and television studios and other non-business organizations. It is also responsible for censoring any materials that offend the sensibilities of the Chinese government, the Communist Party of China or Chinese cultural standards.

Long Tail Theory:

Long tail is a term in statistics and business. A long tail of some distributions of numbers is the portion of the distribution having a large number of occurrences far from the "head" or central part of the distribution. The distribution could involve popularities, random numbers of occurrences of events with various probabilities. In business, long tail is applied to rank-frequency distributions. It is used to describe the retailing strategy of selling a large number of unique items with relatively small quantities sold of each, the "long tail"; and selling fewer popular items in large quantities, the "head". This theory was popularized by Chris Anderson in 2004.

4K:

4K (also called 4K resolution) is used in digital television and cinematography. It refers to a display device, such as TV, or content having horizontal resolution of 4,000

pixels and vertical resolution of 2000 pixels. The use of width to show this overall resolution displays a switch from previous television standards such as 480i and 1080p, which have categorized media according to its vertical dimension. The first commercially available 4K camera for cinematographic purposes was released in 2003. The first 4K video was seen on YouTube in 2013.

3D Film:

3D film, also known as three-dimensional stereoscopic film, three-dimensional film, or S3D film, is a motion picture technique that enhances the illusion of depth perception. It could be said to add “a third dimension”. In stereoscopic photography, a standard motion picture camera system is used to capture the images as seen from two separate perspectives. Therefore, special projection hardware and eyewear are used. 3D films are not limited to just theatrical releases; television broadcasts, along with direct-to-video films, have utilized similar methods for viewing.

Virtual Reality:

Virtual reality, also known as VR, is a computer technology that uses software-generated realistic images, sounds and other worldly sensations to simulate a real environment. It simulates a user’s physical presence in said environment to enable the user to interact and become one with this space. Virtual reality generates sensory experiences artificially; they can include sight, touch, hearing and smell. They can be presented either on a computer monitor, a projector screen, or with a virtual reality headset. And they are experienced or controlled by movement of the body.

Live Streaming:

Live streaming refers to internet content delivered in real time, as events happen, much as live television broadcasts its contents over the airwaves via a television signal.

Bullet Screens:

Bullet Screens, known as Danmu in China, is a streaming format that allows audiences to send text messages commenting on an online program, which are then projected directly onto the program's screen. The words scroll on the screen from right to left like bullets. Live commenting on videos puts user content on equal terms with the video content. It originated in Japan. ACFun and Bilibili are the two Chinese video websites that have popularized the bullet screen.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Along with their surging success, Chinese web series face problems in their development process, such as vulgar content, low cultural value, fragmented length, and inefficient marketing methods. In order to discover a path for Chinese web series' future development, *Go Princess Go*, one of the most popular web series in China in 2016, is an appropriate case to research and analyze. This literature review addresses three areas related to Chinese web series: content, format, and marketing. The first section will address research concerning the elements triggering the Chinese audience to view a web series and the creative elements that helped the series gain popularity. The second section will focus on research studies about different streaming platforms, formats and series lengths. Finally, the third section will discuss the marketing strategies utilized by a web series to increase viewership.

2.2 Content of Chinese Web Series

Based on a 2015 survey from Ku6, a Chinese web series operator, traditional Chinese television series' audiences were predominantly 35-55 years old; however, Chinese web series' audiences are 18-35 years old. The key factors about this group of audience members are that they are young, have time and energy to watch web series, and tend to possess humorous and light-hearted tastes in media content. Therefore, Chinese web series emphasize their "young culture" characteristics. This "young culture" characteristic is first reflected in the web series' themes, which concentrate on young people, the white-collar class, romance and suspense (Lu & Zheng, 2015). (Table 2)

Table 2

Chinese web series genres 2014

Genre	Percentage
Sitcom	31.42%
Teen Drama	17.14%
Urban Romantic Drama	13.19%
Up-lifting Drama	11.43%
Suspense	9.68%
Science Fiction	8.57%
Adventure	5.71%
Fantasy	2.86%

Source: Sootoo Internet Industry Research Institute Report, 2014

Another feature about “young culture” is that web series casts tend to be young, good-looking, and low-cost to cast, which all fit young audience’s viewing tastes. The third point of “young culture” shows in the story structure, which is simple, ironic, symbolic and humorous. The style is designed for young audiences to easily accept, as Chinese youth refuse the traditional top-down education tone, and try to use web series as a means to escape life’s pressures. (Lu & Zheng, 2015).

Chinese web series, especially the successful ones, highlight regular, everyday people as characters with popularized dialogue. Since its inception in the 2000s, Chinese web series’ dismantle the heroic labels of characters. The male characters in the web series are not holy, tough heroes as shown in traditional Chinese TV series. For example, some

web series have even introduced homosexual characters. For female characters, Chinese web series reject traditional Chinese women's images, such as being dependent on men and sacrificing for family, giving them more independent and strong characteristics. This shows modern Chinese women who are independent in work and relationships, and bravely involved in modern society. The characters introduced in web series establish the identity of normal people in this newer "reality", letting the audience find their reflections in the stories, which has helped the series gain great popularity. Humorous dialogue is another successful element that helps web series shape their characters, set up their styles and cater to internet consumers' taste. A plethora of internet lingo is used in web series, and the funny jokes and various plots coming from the series go back to current trends in internet language, becoming daily discussion in normal people's lives (He & Xu, 2015).

According to Chris Anderson's long tail theory, the popular items are considered as "the head", and the significant, scattered non-hit items are called "the tail". However, in summary, all the scattered items on "the tail", a "non-hit" market much larger than the "hit" items market is formed. In China, the traditional elite authoritative culture is "the head". A characteristic of this culture is that it is representative of normal people's lives. It is the non-mainstream culture, which has always been dominated as "the tail" and is now fully expressed in web series that has become the hit in today's society. Specifically, Chinese web series have abandoned the top-down and macro-structured narration of the elite culture. They have developed the story from the common person's micro point of view. Mixed and spliced with time-traveling, science fiction, and fantasy elements, they narrow the gap between the normal audience's multi-dimensional daily subjective perspective, and the grand "objective" history narration and up-in-the-air surreal set ups. This kind of multiple

“reachable” content harbors a great opportunity to spread and gain popularity at a rapid pace. However, this rapid development has also caused an abundance of Chinese web series to manifest the representation of low quality shows with nonsense spoof, erotica, and violent elements, using vulgar methods to attract audiences (Jiao, 2014).

In order to strengthen the supervision and control of web series, in 2014, the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television released *Internet Audio and Visual Program Service Regulations* and *Supplementary Rules on Further Improving the Web Series, Online Short Films and other Internet Audio and Visual Programs*. As a result of these two government documents, large numbers of web series were removed in the name of “cleaning the internet”. Not only did the low quality vulgar web series get “cleaned”, but also some web series that displayed any of the following elements: sex, violence, homosexual, or western values. That content was considered disruptive to Chinese mainstream values, damaging the image of the country and society, leading people to perversion. In this case, the regulations mainly targeted the web series that strayed from traditional mainstream values (Fang & Zhu, 2015).

2.3 Format of Chinese Web Series

In the 4G era, no matter the streaming content or the consumption format, both tend to be “short” and “swift”. On one hand, as people’s lives become more and more occupied, except for some college students who still have the time to watch formal series, most of the working class is too busy to spend 40 minutes to watch one episode of a TV series. Additionally, the 4G era provides a multi-screen arena. Personal computers, smart phones, and tablets have funneled and absorbed the majority of TV viewers. Smart phones,

as a new video-consumption platform, are portable, alive, and easy to use, which decreases and disintegrates the “ritualization” and “sanctification” towards media consumption. Web series seem to be fast, entertaining products for audiences on which to consume media (Zhang, 2015).

With the integrative multi-screen development of personal computers, smart phones, tablets and televisions, viewer’s entertainment platforms and formats have become diverse. In the early development stage of video websites, the personal computer was the main tool for people to watch video programs online; however, with the availability of mobile internet, the rate of viewing online videos on personal computers has dropped, and the rate of using smart phones, tablets and other portable platforms has risen sharply. By the end of 2014, the smart phone utilization rate in watching websites’ videos has exceeded that of personal computers.

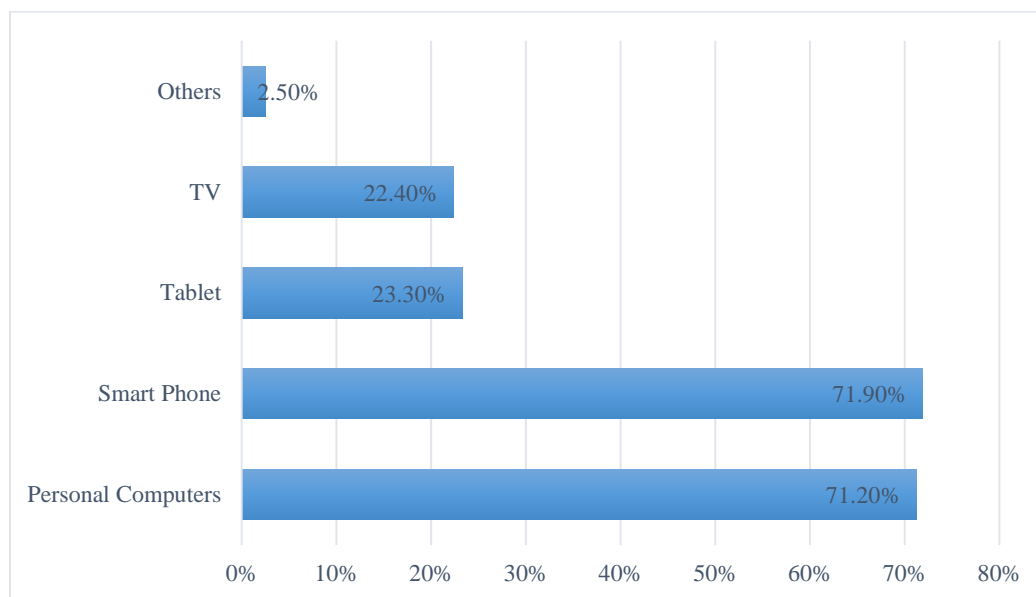


Figure 2. Utilization rate of video websites’ platforms

Source: CNNIC Survey Report of Chinese Internet Development, December, 2014

People's viewing time on different platforms varies as well. Viewers spend the most amount of time on computers to watch videos; the next is tablets and last are smart phones. Web series and films increase audience attachment. The majority of the audience spends more than 30 minutes viewing video programs on all platforms. (Figure 3)

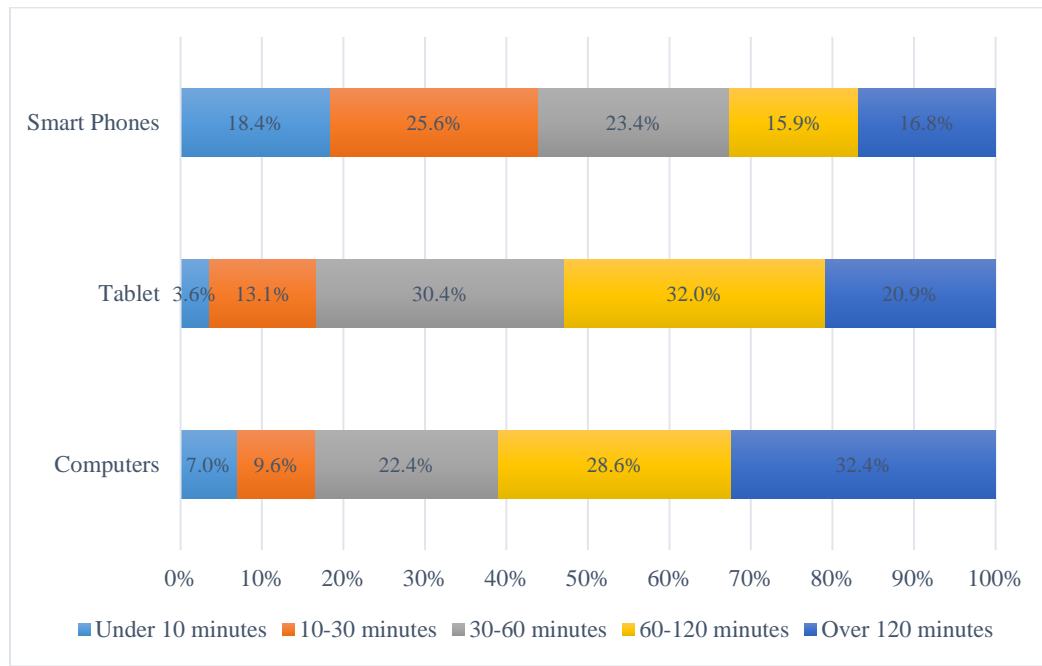


Figure 3. Online video viewing time on different platforms

Source: CNNIC Survey Report of Chinese Internet Development, December, 2014

Based on the survey results, it is not hard to deduce the reasons that most web series keep their length within 30 minutes; and some of the super-short sitcoms, designed for smart phone video consumers to watch within their fragmented time, are kept to 10 minutes (China Internet Network Information Center, 2015).

Based on a 2014 survey by Wang Ju Bang, the first Chinese web series research institute, among 1524 interviewees, 70% of the audience watched web series for 30-120 minutes each; more than half of the audience preferred web series length to be 30-60 minutes per episode. Super-short series was not their preferable choice (Wang Ju Bang, 2015).

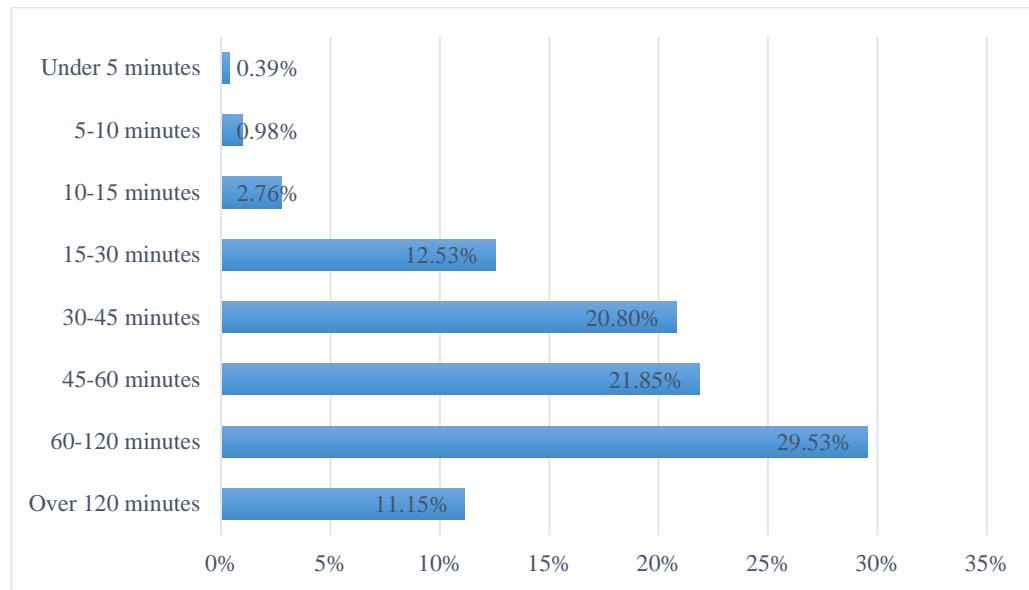


Figure 4. Duration of audience web series viewing

Source: iClick Internet Survey on Web Series, December, 2014

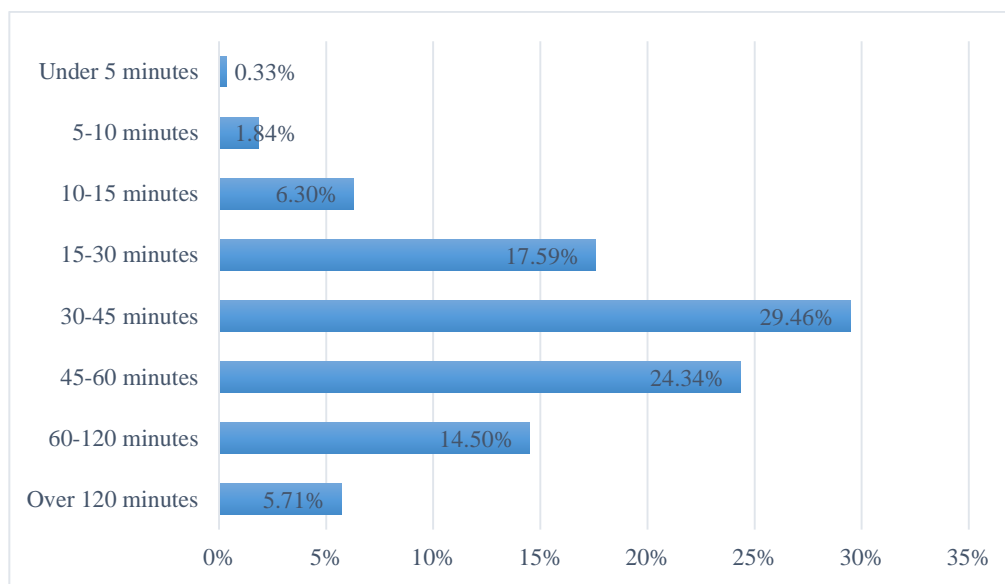


Figure 5. Audiences' preferable longest length for one episode of a web series

Source: iClick Internet Survey on Web Series, December, 2014

2.4 Marketing of Chinese Web Series

There are four main strategies to market Chinese web series: first, video websites promote their web series on their own websites. Usually, a video website opens a special section for its web series on its home page, and posters and trailers are displayed to attract an audience. Second, video websites collaborate with social media and promote on their networks. On these social network platforms, the web series marketing team and creators actively interact with their fans. The messages they “tweet” on Weibo are usually read and forwarded by thousands of people; these “tweets” become trending topics and promote the series. Third, by using and analyzing data collected from their subscribers, video websites design content for the targeted audience. Once the subscribers log in to the video websites, their activities are recorded, forming the data. Video websites use the data to improve their products, find their exact target audience, and produce web series based on the target

audience preferences. Last but not least, web series generate revenue through subscriptions and advertising (Zheng, 2015). The first three marketing strategies directly help websites increase their subscriber base and increase subscription revenue. The advertising revenue primarily comes from pre-roll video and product placement. For iQIYI's first web series *Say Yes Online*, iQIYI spent \$1.7 million on this series and collaborated with many advertisers to have their products placed in the series. Only two advertisers' investments made it possible for iQIYI to have its costs covered. However, due to the long length of pre-roll video advertising and the low quality of the product placement, the web series' quality and the audience's viewing experience dropped. Additionally, there are still a large amount of potential subscribers to be developed and many subsidiary businesses attached to web series and TV stations as well as related products that need to be connected and explored (Zheng, 2015).

Production with audience participation is a new way to promote web series. For example, QQlive set up a marketing team for *Death Notify*. They are in charge of collecting comments after each episode is released. Directors and producers read the popular comments, analyze audience preferences and reactions to the plot and characters, and use the data and analyzed information for the production of future episodes. This shooting-as-broadcasting production method triggers broad discussion on social networks, which brings the video websites significant profit. This phenomenon is called the "fans economy effect" (Lu, 2015).

Penguin Intelligence, a research institute under Tencent Holdings Limited, conducted a 2015 survey on audience behavior on interaction with video websites. Among 4334 interviewees, almost 70% were more likely to interact on portable internet devices,

such as smart phones and tablets. Respondents preferred to read the comments rather than write them. 70% of the interviewees revealed that they liked reading the comments while watching the web series; and more than half of the respondents said that they didn't dislike the "bullet screens". In the 2010s, interactive functionality had become more and more important for video websites, and it resulted in new revenue to explore (Penguin Intelligence, 2015). (Figure 6 & 7)

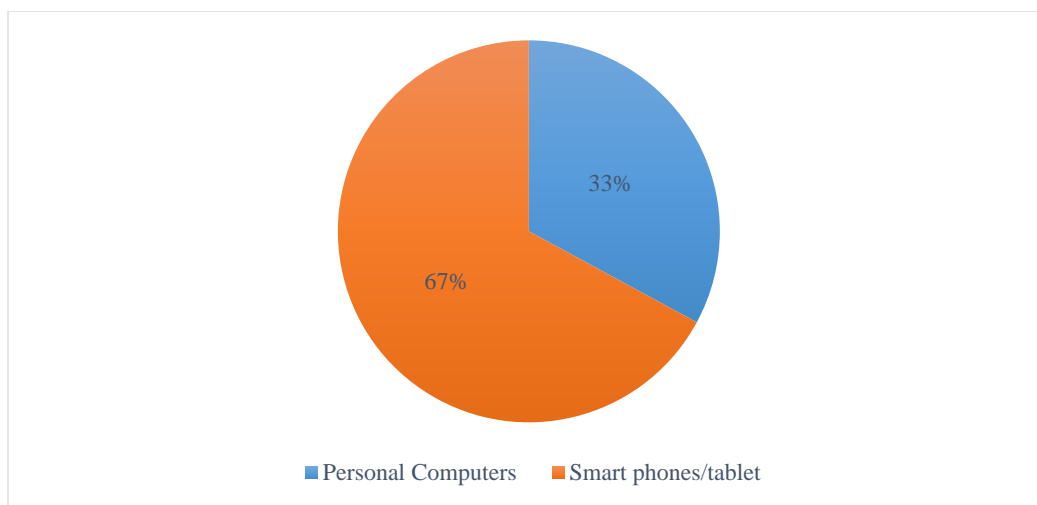


Figure 6. Audience preferred platforms for video website interaction

Source: Penguin Intelligence's survey report on audience behavior on interaction with video websites, June, 2015

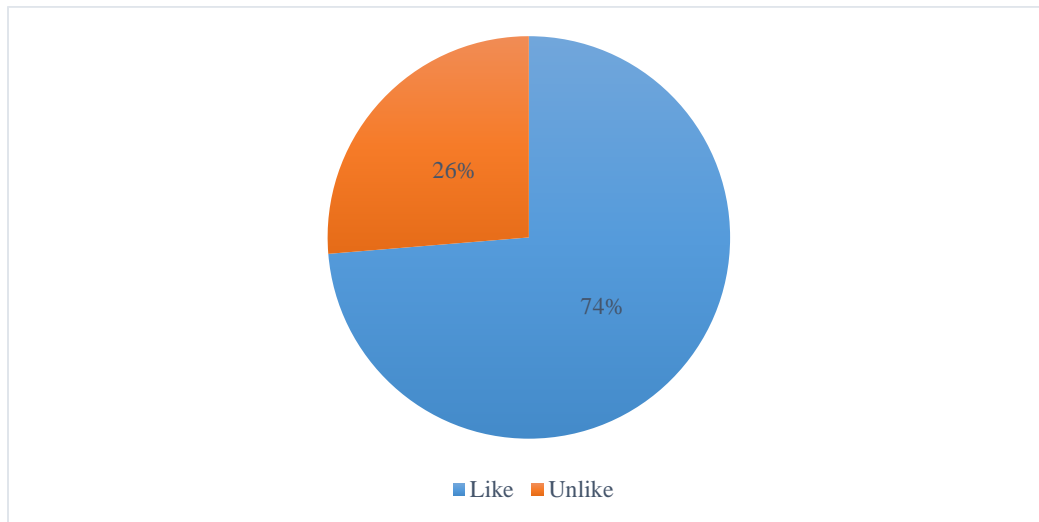


Figure 7. Audience attitudes toward comments while watching web series

Source: Penguin Intelligence's survey report on audience behavior on interaction with the video websites, June, 2015

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Chinese web series have been in a growth period since 2014. Accompanying this prosperity, are a few problems, such as vulgar content, fragmented length, and inefficient marketing methods. This research takes *Go Princess Go*, one of the most popular web series in China in 2016, as a case study to discuss the successes and problems in three areas of typical Chinese web series: content, format, and marketing.

The research questions in this study included the following:

1. What elements trigger the Chinese audience to watch a web series and what creative elements help the series gain popularity?
2. What streaming platform, format and length of a web series are appropriate for audience viewing behavior?
3. What are the marketing strategies utilized in a successful web series to help maximize its viewership?

In response to the research questions above, this study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods were used in the analysis of *Go Princess Go*'s success in content, format and marketing areas. A survey was conducted among a sample audience, and each survey question was collected and analyzed. Qualitative research was conducted to determine the content and the special interactive activities that *Go Princess Go*'s production team used to promote this web series and achieve success. Results of an interview with *Go Princess Go*'s director and producer were analyzed.

3.2 Setting

Based on the methodology design of this research, quantitative research was conducted online with a questionnaire survey being created and distributed via *SurveyMonkey*, an online survey service. A survey link was sent via email and social media platforms that have broad impact and popularity among the Chinese community, such as WeChat and Weibo. Individuals who could access the survey link were able to participate in this survey. Qualitative research was conducted from the in-depth interviews, articles and videos online with the director and producer of *Go Princess Go*. The narrative data was translated from Chinese to English, coded and categorized in each research area.

3.3 Sample/Participants

The sampling procedure in this study used by the researcher was convenience sampling. The participants were restricted to the Chinese speaking community, including friends, family and coworkers of the researcher and other accessible people who received the survey through the researcher's friends, family and coworkers. There were 78 effective participants, who were diverse in background and age. Among 35 male and 43 female participants, 4 participants were under the age of 20, 53 participants were age 20-30, 18 participants were age 30-40, 2 participants were age 40-50, and 2 participants were over 50.

In qualitative research, the researcher used purposive sampling. The samples were the *Go Princess Go* director and producer. They were selected based upon their knowledge and background in the web series industry, as well as in order to provide content and marketing insights into the series' success.

3.4 Measurement Instruments

Audience Opinion Survey on Web Series Go Princess Go was sent out by the researcher via email and social media platforms to the Chinese speaking community both in China and the United States. This survey was used to measure audience opinion on *Go Princess Go*'s content, format and marketing results. 112 survey responses were collected, and among them, 78 responses were effective. 11 questions were included in the survey. Interviews were also used to collect data, the primary 10 questions covered in both content and marketing research areas were collected, organized, interpreted into narrative data and analyzed.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study was collected through survey and interviews. The survey data was directly collected from *SurveyMonkey*, organized and interpreted into three research areas for the purpose of answering three major research questions in this thesis, without any intervention and manipulation. The interviews were collected from published interviews of *Go Princess Go*'s director and producer. The data was then categorized in two areas in word format for further interpretation. Both quantitative and qualitative data were conducted in Chinese and translated into English by the researcher. Overall, specific survey and interview results were matched to answer the first question about the web series' content; the survey data covered the second research question about the web series' platform and length; and both survey and interview results addressed the marketing methods in the last question. All the results were presented in words, numbers, and figures to answer the related research questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Research findings directly related to the survey and interview results that were collected through quantitative and qualitative methods. *Audience Opinion Survey on Web Series Go Princess Go* was sent out by the researcher via email and social media platforms to the Chinese speaking community. This survey was used to measure audience opinion on *Go Princess Go*'s content, format and marketing results. Interviews were also used to collect data. They covered both content and marketing research areas, and were collected, organized, and interpreted into narrative data and analyzed. From the results, Chinese web series' problems in content, format and marketing were analyzed and discussed.

4.2 Audience Opinion Survey on Web Series *Go Princess Go*

The survey link for *Audience Opinion Survey on Web Series Go Princess Go* was sent out by the researcher via email and social media platforms. 112 responses were collected within one month. Question #1 asked respondents whether they had seen *Go Princess Go*, and 78 people gave a positive answer; thus, the researcher utilized these 78 respondents as participants for this research. Among 78 participants, 35 were male and 43 were female, from different age groups. 4 participants were under age 20, 53 participants were from 20-30, 18 participants were from 30-40, 2 participants were from 40-50, and 2 participants were over 50.

Question #2 asked how did the audience get to know *Go Princess Go*. 65.38% of the respondents chose social media, such as Weibo and WeChat; 28.21% chose word-of-mouth; 3.85% chose others, such as a website homepage or "hot topics" recommendation

on search engines; and only 1.28% chose newspaper or television. It showed that traditional publication and broadcasting were not the channels helping to promote the web series. As the internet and social media have become part of people's lives, internet promotion and distribution became a more effective and impactful method for people to get topical information and for businesses to approach their consumers.

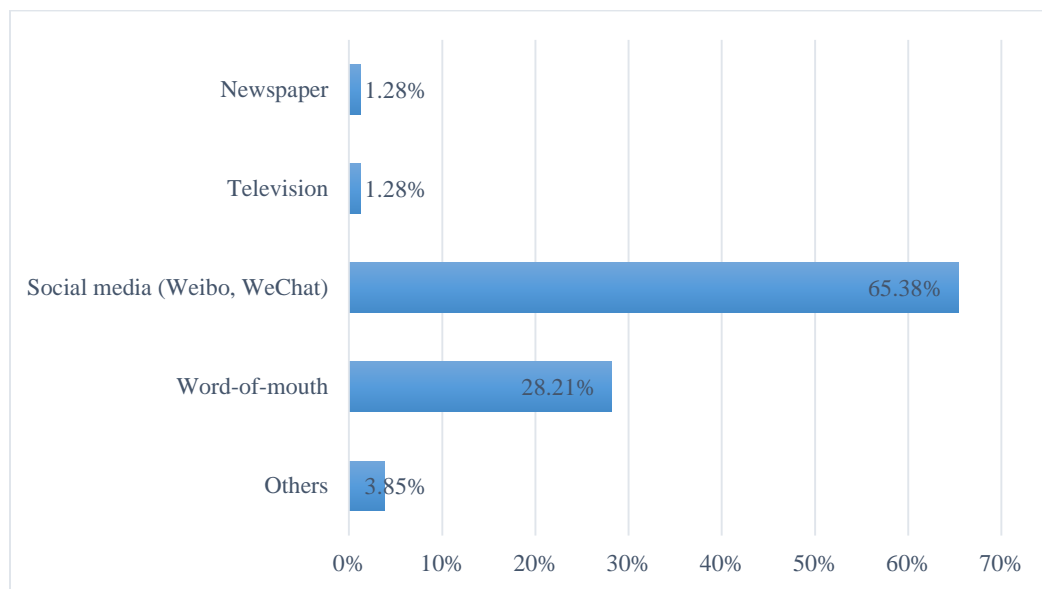


Figure 8. The platform on which people got to know *Go Princess Go*

Questions #3 intends to determine the factors that initially attracted the audience to watch *Go Princess Go*. 51.32% of respondents admitted that they followed the trend; 34.21% were recommended by others; 10.53% watched this web series because of their love of history fantasy drama; Only 2.63% chose to watch because they loved watching web series; and only 1.32% were loyal consumers of LeTV, the video website that produced and released *Go Princess Go*. This result indicated that for most of the audience, the motivation to choose to watch a web series was mostly influenced by their surroundings, such as others'

recommendation and the hot topics being talked about in daily life. This suggests that the marketing and promotion of a web series are more important than the format and the platform it utilized.

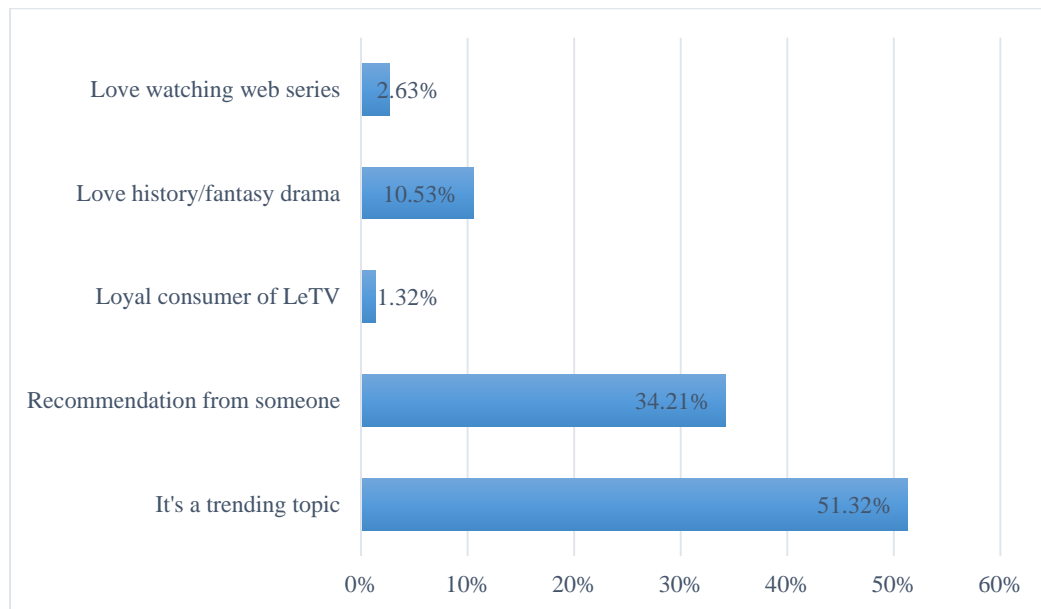


Figure 9. The factors that promoted the audience to watch *Go Princess Go*

Question #4 attempts to ascertain the production factors that attract the audience to sit down and watch the series. It was a content question for a web series. The first-ranked factor was funny dialogue and jokes, and 44.87% of the respondents chose this element; the outrageous production design and costumes took second place, with 19.23% of the respondents choosing it; 17.95% showed that the appealing and creative story attracted them the most; 7.69% of the respondents deemed the cast to be great; and 10.26% thought other elements attracted them, such as transgender and homosexuality concepts, and some watched just to kill time. Considering the majority of the participants were 20-30 years of

age, this young generation preferred series content and styles different from traditional drama, and they were more likely to watch shows that were light-hearted and humorous to release their pressure. Thus, the results also showed that the content, especially the dialogue and jokes, were the key elements to attract a younger viewer.

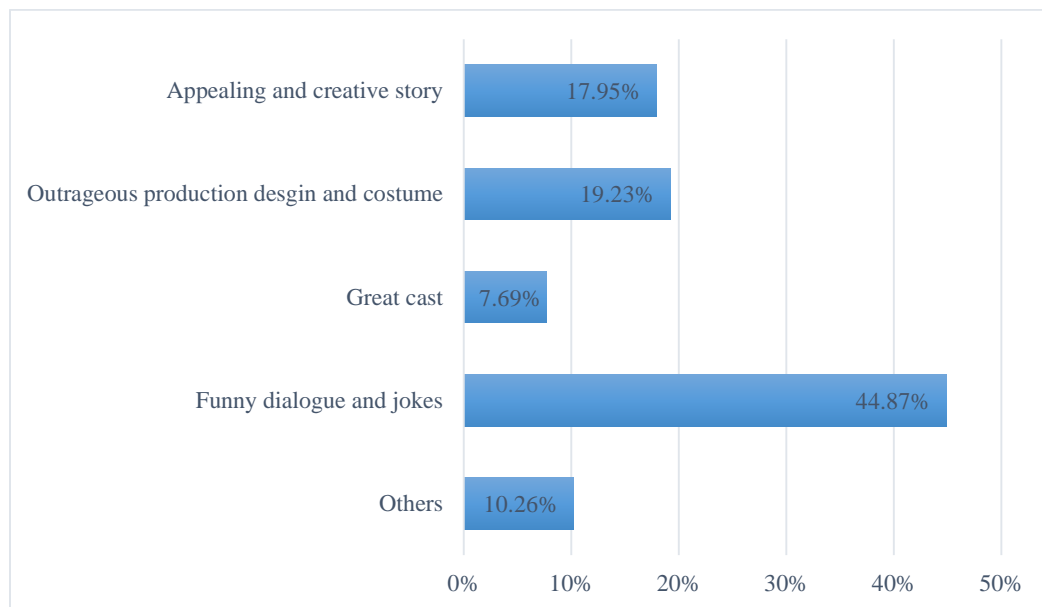


Figure 10. The most attractive production elements about *Go Princess Go*

Question #5 was designed to examine audience viewing behavior and determine which platform they preferred to use to watch a web series. 41.03% of the respondents used personal computers to watch *Go Princess Go*; 25.64% used a tablet; 23.08% used their smart phones; and 10.26% used other platforms, such as TV on-demand. It was interesting to see that for a web series with 20-25 minutes in length, personal computers were still the first choice for people to watch a web series online. However, the total percentage for using portable devices, tablets and smart phones, was higher than the use of personal computers.

It reached 48.72%, indicating that almost half of the participants preferred to use portable devices to watch the web series. Also, since TV on-demand didn't become readily available until 2012, the devices for TV on-demand hadn't broadly covered Chinese families. Thus, very few of the participants watched *Go Princess Go* by TV on-demand.

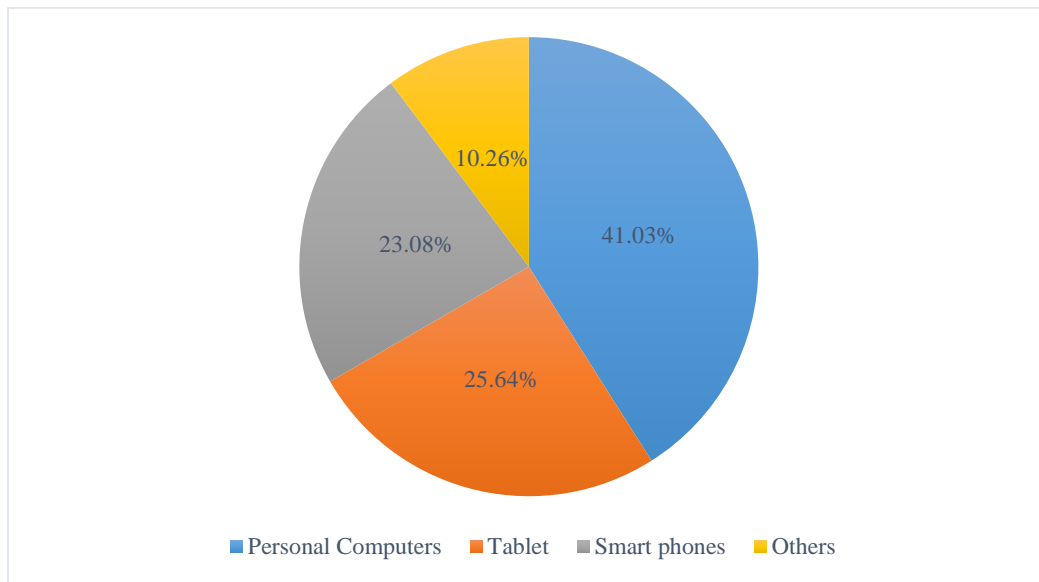


Figure 11. The platform people used to watch *Go Princess Go*

Question #6 intends to determine audience opinion on the appropriate length for an episode of a web series. One episode of *Go Princess Go* is about 20-25 minutes. For this length, 67.95% of the respondents felt it was appropriate; 28.21% thought it was too short; and only 3.84% felt the length was too long. Compared to some highly popular web series, *Go Princess Go*'s content length for one episode was comfortable and satisfied most of the audience.

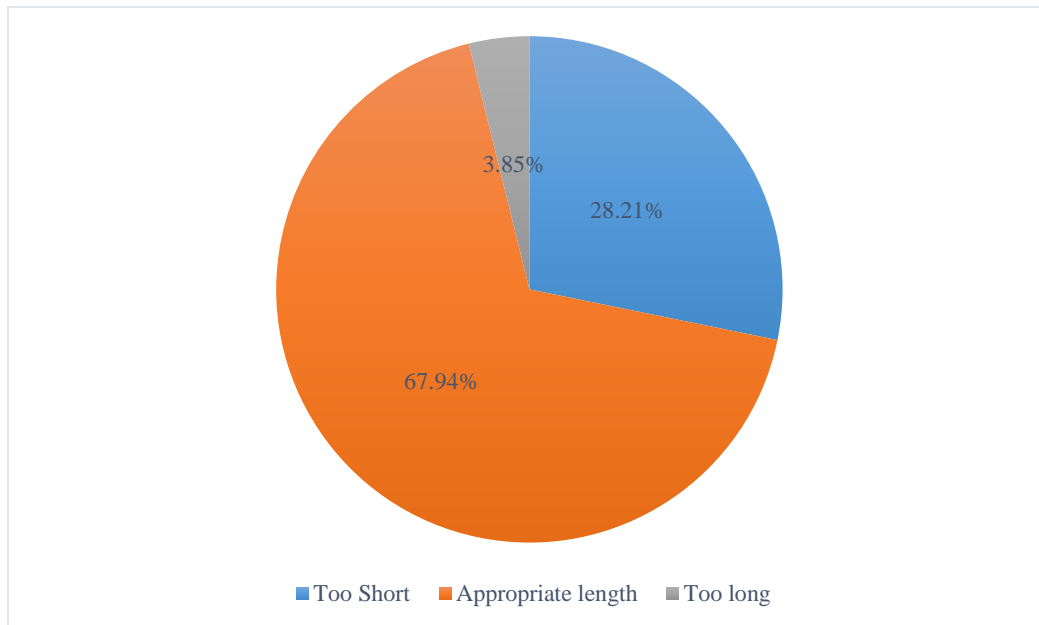


Figure 12. Audience opinion on *Go Princess Go*'s episode length

The subsequent two questions are marketing based, and attempt to analyze audience interaction with a web series. Question #7 asked about the extent of audience attentiveness or searching for *Go Princess Go*'s relevant news, information and other promotion. The responses were valued from 1 to 5, "Not often" to "Very often", 5 levels. 43.59% of respondents chose level 1, "Not often"; 12.82% chose level 2; 24.36% chose level 3; 14.10% chose level 4; and 5.13% chose level 5, "Very often". The average score for this question is 2.24, which leaned toward "not often". It was interesting to learn from the results that most of the audience didn't actively get relevant information. In the promotion process, the audience were not the "hot topics" active creators or supporters, but passive receivers, following the trend.

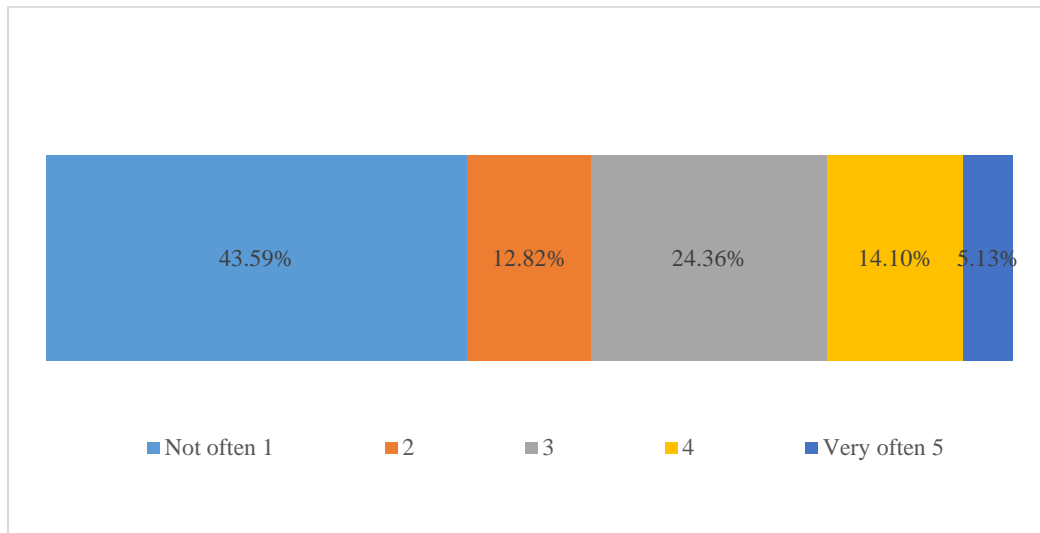


Figure 13. The extent that audiences pay attention or search for *Go Princess Go*'s relevant news and other information

Question #8 intends to analyze the extent of audience involvement in interacting with this web series. 43.59% of the respondents expressed that they didn't completely involve themselves in the interaction with the web series; 34.62% chose "I paid attention and searched its relevant news and information"; 16.67% showed that they had tweeted or re-tweeted its relevant news on social media, such as Weibo; 5.13% of joined Go Princess Go's QQ fans group, and interacted through Live Telecast with this web series' director and cast. The results show that only a small percent of the audience were true fans of *Go Princess Go* and were willing to actively interact with the web series production or marketing team to know more information about this web series. However, no matter whether people were actively involved in the interaction with the web series or just passively received the information, the total percentage of people involved in the

interaction with this web series was 56.41%. It was over the percentage representing people who didn't participate at all.

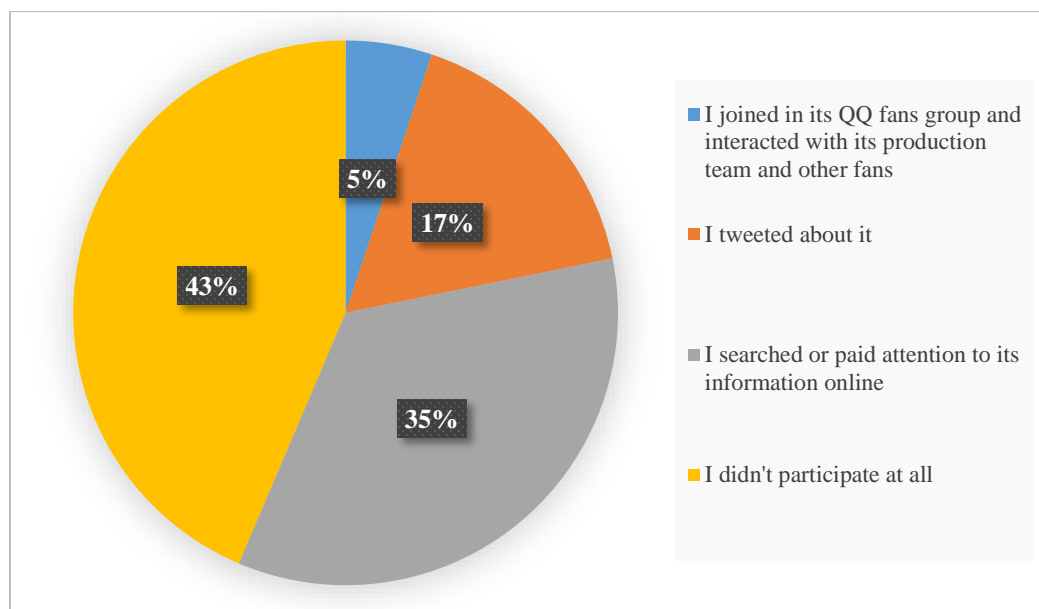


Figure 14. The extent of audience interaction with *Go Princess Go*

Question #9 attempts to determine people's opinion on what caused *Go Princess Go* to gain such popularity. 51.28% of the respondents believed that "the marketing promotion on social media is strong"; 25.64% thought the success of *Go Princess Go* was because of the "outrageous" production; 15.38% indicated that "the culture presented in this series is close to me"; only 5.13% chose "the cast is attractive", and 2.56% thought the story was appealing. The result confirmed that marketing and promotion was the main engine to push a web series to become popular. All interactive activities online were trying to set up a party for internet consumers by the video websites. (Figure 15)

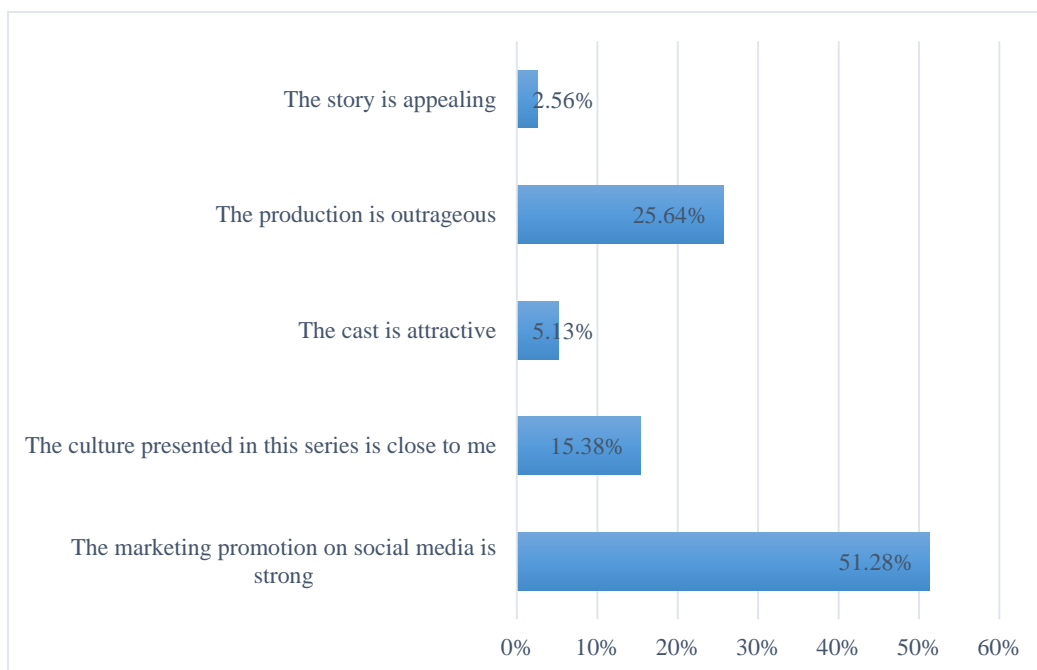


Figure 15. Audience opinion on *Go Princess Go*'s success

4.3 Creation of *Go Princess Go*

Content research was addressed via interview of Lv Hao Jiji, the director of *Go Princess Go*, by *Shiqu Interaction* in 2016. The main topic concerned the first research question in this study, “what creative elements help the series gain popularity”. Lv Hao Jiji talked about four factors in production that made *Go Princess Go* outstanding: story set up, production design and costume, cast, and dialogue.

Go Princess Go is a fantasy comedy that tells a story about a modern playboy who travels back to ancient times and lives in a body of a princess, mixing the concepts of time traveling, bisexuality and gender identity. When *Go Princess Go* was still in its development stage, Lv Hao Jiji and the screenwriter, Qin Shuang, looked at the data and established their target audience at age 20-30. They found out what elements attracted this group of young internet consumers most when they read web novels or watched web series.

Then they blended these plots together with time travel, bisexuality, transgender, fashion and other elements that their target audience was interested in. They also incorporated a light-hearted tone, which was humorous, playful, fast paced and outrageous, to fit the taste of the younger generation.

The production design and costuming was another selling point for *Go Princess Go*. The ancient characters didn't dress like traditional ancient people, but put on slippers, short skirts and plastic armor. The design was really dramatic and abnormal, and lots of contrasted colors were used. Lv Hao Jiji pointed out that although the production team spent only \$17,000 on its costumes, all the design was well thought out and planned. Lv attempted to make *Go Princess Go* totally different from traditional, serious period dramas, so he used a dramatic color palette to express the characters; references from 2015 fashion shows were used in the costume design as well. His purpose was to try to grab the young generation's attention. "My final goal is, within the limited budget, to make an extraordinary period drama web series that has never been done before", said Lv Hao Jiji.

Although there was no budget for *Go Princess Go* to cast stars, Lv cast young actors with good looks, but lacking in acting experience. Lv said this cast was actually good for this outrageous web series, because almost none of the actors had experience with the traditional period drama acting formula. This made it easier for him to direct the actors within this new context. Lv also arranged some internet jokes and trendy words into the plot and the dialogue, shortening the distance between audience and period dramas, meanwhile making the series ridiculous but funny.

Li Lizeng, the content executive director of LeTV, who also produced *Go Princess Go*, expressed that the main target audience of the web series was around age 18 to 27; and

most of them were students or young white-collar adults. This group of people, called the internet generation, didn't like shows with a top-down educational tone. Thus, web series provided them a platform to consume with an equal prospective. Meanwhile, as the sub-culture became more and more popular as the internet generation developed, some outrageous sub-culture products were accepted by the mainstream culture, which provided *Go Princess Go* a good business opportunity.

4.4 Marketing of *Go Princess Go*

The marketing research was based on an analysis of the interview materials by *Shiqu Interaction* with Wu Xuan, LeTV's marketing executive, and Hua Sheng, LeTV's web series' marketing manager.

Wu Xuan explained that the key point that made *Go Princess Go* achieve so much success was the contribution of its marketing team. When the team got the samples of this web series, they watched it several times, uncovered and categorized more than 300 "trash talk topics" in this series and put those topics online. They then observed which topic the audience was interested in, and centrally promoted this topic. "We planned many plans. In the beginning we thought the most interesting topic was maybe the period dramas' plot, but the data showed that the audience was not interested in it at all. Then we changed our plan many times. Finally, we found out that the transgender topic and the love between a transgender man and a real man were the most interesting topic that the audience talked about. After we found this break-through point and promoted it, this web series has been expanding greatly on the internet", said Wu Xuan. Within 9 days of its premiere, *Go Princess Go* generated 400 million views. The topics on *Go Princess Go* have been read

on Weibo over 480 million times, and the discussion about its topics included over 387,000 messages. Hua Sheng indicated that *Go Princess Go* was designed for audience “trash talking” and getting entertainment from the beginning. “All the topics that audiences have talked about on social media were within the marketing team’s chosen topics and presupposition”, said Hua Sheng, “We dropped about 300 topics online, and concentrated on promoting and managing only 10 to 20 topics that people focused on. In the first week of *Go Princess Go*’s online release, we found some ‘key opinion leaders’ on social media, who got a lot fans online, to help us promote this series. In the second week, we did a live telecast of the production team and cast with the audience, letting the audience directly know more topics about the behind the scenes’ secrets to construct several new ‘trash talk topics’. At the same time, we bought some social media to help us promote these topics on their platforms.”

Go Princess Go had only two products placed in the entire show. One was a type of medicine and another was a feminine hygiene product. Hua Sheng expressed that the production and marketing team specifically designed the plots for these two products and made them “trash talk topics” as well. As a result, these two product placements didn’t prevent the audience from watching the series, but became selling points and topics that people talked about as jokes on social media.

Another marketing element of *Go Princess Go* was fan management. Wu Xuan pointed out that, after analyzing the data, the marketing team found out that their target audiences were more likely to use a QQ group to chat online, compared to other social media platforms. Thus, the marketing team set up a *Go Princess Go*’s QQ group. Thousands of fans swarmed the group. Setting up the QQ group was not enough;

motivating the fans' passion and keeping an active interaction were more important for the promotion. The advantages for this interaction between fans and the production team were as follows: first, the fans always brought good ideas and points of discussion that supported the production team to shape some future storylines and promotional plans. Second, once the production team held an activity, the first group of people helping the team to promote was these fans. Third, the fans monitored and reported in the QQ group once they found pirated video websites playing *Go Princess Go*. It saved the marketing team's time and increased its working efficiency.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Since 2014, Chinese web series have been through a rapid period of expansion. *Go Princess Go* was one of the most popular web series in 2016. It was ranked as the No.1 web series on the Guduo hot web series list, and was a top one hit for a web series on the Vlinkage list (Zhang, 2016). Its number of relevant articles on Baidu, China's biggest search engine, was about 4,190,000. Along with success, there are also challenges that Chinese web series' face, such as vulgar content, fragmented length and inefficient marketing methods. The study was designed to utilize the case of *Go Princess Go* to explore which factors contribute to success and what challenges Chinese web series should take into consideration for future development.

5.2 Discussion

One of the biggest successes of *Go Princess Go* was its outstanding production. *Go Princess Go*'s production not only fit the market requirement, but was also bold and creative. First, the production team established its target audience at age 20-30, which was the main target audience of web series from the video websites' research platforms' data. They refused to follow the traditional top-down education strategy, and preferred light-hearted, humorous, bold and popular styled media products. Based on this group of young audiences' characteristics, the team chose the series themes and topics close to young people's interests, such as romance, time-traveling, transgender sexuality, etc. Second, visually speaking, the director attempted to make the series eye-catching. He cast young and good-looking actors, used dramatic, unusual, bold, and modern fashion design

elements into the production design and costumes. Third, for character introduction, *Go Princess Go* debuted a transgender character in the series, and made them the main character. Also, the creator introduced a common person in modern life traveling back to ancient times, turning him into a loyal princess. This set up is close to a common person's perspective and easy for an audience to accept and feel close to the characters. Last but not least, the story telling for *Go Princess Go* was light-hearted, humorous, playful and outrageous. Many internet jokes and trendy words were woven into the characters' dialogue, which fit the tastes of the young target audience and met their needs to relieve the pressures from daily life. All of the outstanding elements in the production, bundled together with marketing strategies, finally became the major selling points.

Another reason for *Go Princess Go*'s success was because it chose the appropriate platform, format and length to deliver its content. As the 4G era arrived, multi-screen technology became available. Based on the prior research detailed in the literature review, viewer's entertainment platforms extend to personal computers, smart phones, tablets, etc., and the rate of using portable platforms has risen sharply. Based on responses to the *Audience Opinion Survey on Web Series Go Princess Go*, the results show that almost half of the participants preferred to use portable devices to watch this web series. It had LeTV setting up streaming services on portable devices for *Go Princess Go* to fit the trend of audience viewing behavior and helped it reach more viewers. In addition, the results of the survey expressed that the majority of the audience felt 20-25 minutes was an appropriate length for one episode of a web series, which was also the *Go Princess Go* episode length. That indicated that *Go Princess Go* chose a comfortable, satisfying format to deliver its content to the audiences, and it has become another reason for the success of this web series.

Go Princess Go gained popularity not by accident; from its development to production, premiere and promotion, every process was calculated and designed based on research into audience behavior and other data. Marketing strategies played a big role in its success. First, there were three main ways that people became informed about this series: social media, word-of-mouth, and publications. The first two were interpersonal interactions, and they were the fastest channels that viewers used to get information. *Go Princess Go*'s team accurately utilized the advantages of interpersonal interaction and made the series expand online. The survey results and the interview with Wu Xuan showed that *Go Princess Go* strategically chose social media as the promotional platform and set up a "trash talk" community for audiences online, where they could share their opinions on this web series with friends, family and other show lovers, and actively promote it to more of their friends. Second, the team accurately used trend-following behavior of the younger demographic, which was the target audience. The survey results indicated that most people watched *Go Princess Go* because it was a trendy hot topic. Once a series became a hot topic and was discussed frequently through people's surroundings in daily life, they intended to catch the trend and join in the group conversation so that they wouldn't feel left behind. In order to make the series a hot topic, the marketing team of *Go Princess Go* prepared more than 300 "trash talk topics" and concentrated on promoting and managing the top 10 to 20 topics that triggered people's interest. All the outrageous and abnormal elements in the show's production became "trash talk topics" and entertained its audience. Additionally, *Go Princess Go* also collaborated with social media platforms and created live online telecasts to help the series' topics disseminate and be promoted. Third, the marketing team focused on interaction with the audience, especially setting up *Go*

Princess Go's fan group and actively managing it, making it an effective promotional tool. Based on survey results, in the promotion process, although a great number of people followed the trend, most of the audience was not an active creator or supporter, but passive receivers. Only a few of the audience members were true fans of the series and were willing to actively interact with the web series production or marketing to know more information about the series. However, *Go Princess Go*'s marketing team just utilized this situation, and set up fan groups for this subset of the special audience, motivating their passion and keeping an active interaction with them. The team let the fans bring good ideas and topics that supported the production team to shape the series and make it close to the audience; they made the fans become the ones to fight and promote the series online; also, the fans helped the marketing team monitor pirated video websites. This kind of "fan management" was the new power in marketing and helped the series gain popularity and profits. Last but not least, product placement was not simply dropped in the series, but was well designed within the plots and also made as "trash talk topics", the selling points, in the show, which was a new strategy for product placement.

5.3 Limitations

This research utilized *Go Princess Go* as a case study to explore what factors contribute to its success and what elements that Chinese web series should take into consideration for future development. The study took both quantitative and qualitative research by analyzing the survey results and interview materials. However, due to the limitation of the samples, some of the results couldn't fully represent the main trend and the true situation of the audiences' opinions on *Go Princess Go*, such as the platform

utilization and other viewing behaviors. Also, *Go Princess Go* has some specialties in genres and production. For example, the time travel and transgender themes were not suited for other web series. The successful experience of this show may not fit the universal web series' production and promotion.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results of the study and the limitations indicated in this research, there are few recommendations for future research. First, due to the sample size used in the survey, it may not have been large enough and the chosen samples may not be completely representative. The researcher suggests enlarging the sample size, making the samples more representative. Moreover, *Go Princess Go* has some specialties in genres, themes and production. The successful experience analyzed in this research may not fit the universal web series' production and promotion. Thus, the researcher recommends future study on similar topics with respect to the web series' differences and that the research should be based on the web series' specific situation.

5.5. Conclusion

Go Princess Go was a web series that was designed for a video website audience and created for a social media platform. The success of *Go Princess Go* was not by accident. For production, it strategically analyzed the market and accurately streamlined its target audience. The bold themes it chose, the outrageous production design and costumes it presented, the humorous storytelling style it constructed, and the popular dialogue and jokes it used, were all elements in this series that exactly fit the taste of its target audience.

Meanwhile, bundled together with its marketing strategies, it became the series' selling point and created hot online discussion. Also, *Go Princess Go* chose the appropriate platform, format and length to deliver its content, which was just as important for its success. The most significant factor for *Go Princess Go*'s success was what was discovered in this study: its special marketing strategies. *Go Princess Go*'s marketing team chose social media as the platform, utilizing the advantages of interpersonal interaction and the behaviors of the young generation, to formulate "trash talk topics" and collaborate with social media and the fan groups it created to promote the series online. Also, instead of putting product placement so pronounced like other web series, *Go Princess Go*'s production team well designed the plots around the product placement in the series. Its marketing team made the product placement the "trash talk topics" and let it become the selling point of the series.

Overall, the success of *Go Princess Go* was counted for its well-designed strategies in content, format and marketing. For the future development of Chinese web series, not only should outstanding content be developed, but also understanding of the target audiences' needs, collaboration with social media platforms, and the various creative interactive promotional strategies should be encouraged.

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Appendix A

Audience Opinion Survey on Web Series *Go Princess Go*

For the purpose of good research on an analysis on the Chinese web series *Go Princess Go*, we kindly ask you to spend a few minutes to finish this survey. This is an anonymous questionnaire, and it is for a student thesis research at Drexel University. Your personal information will be protected and only used for this research. Thank you for your support!

1. Have you seen *Go Princess Go*?
 - Yes
 - No
2. How did you get to know *Go Princess Go*?
 - Newspaper
 - Television
 - Social media (Weibo, WeChat)
 - Word-of-mouth
 - Other ____ (please list here)
3. What prompted you to watch *Go Princess Go*?
 - Love watching web series
 - Love history/fantasy drama
 - Loyal consumer of LeTV
 - Recommendation from someone

- It's a trending topic
4. What is the most attractive production element about *Go Princess Go*?
 - Appealing and creative story
 - Outrageous production design and costuming
 - Great cast
 - Funny dialogue and jokes
 - Others ____ (please list here)
 5. What platform do you usually use to watch *Go Princess Go*?
 - Computer
 - iPad
 - Smart phone
 - Others ____ (please list here)
 6. How do you like the episode length of *Go Princess Go* as a web series (20-25 minutes)?
 - Too short
 - Appropriate length
 - Too long
 7. How active did you search for information about *Go Princess Go* when it was airing on LeTV?

Not often 1 2 3 4 5 Very often
 8. How did you participate in *Go Princess Go*'s internet marketing?
 - I joined in its QQ group and interacted with its production team and other fans
 - I tweeted about it

- I searched or paid attention to its information online
- I didn't participate at all

9. What is your opinion on *Go Princess Go*'s success?

- The story is appealing
- The production is outrageous
- The cast is attractive
- The culture presented in this series is close to me
- The marketing promotion on social media is strong

10. What's your age?

- Under 20
- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- Above 50

11. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

